



Invest in the Social & Economic Inclusion of People with Disabilities

IWA pre-budget submission calls for investment in real outcomes that improve the quality of life for people with disabilities.



INTRODUCTION

The Irish Wheelchair Association was founded in 1960 by a small group of wheelchair users and today has over 20,000 members and service users. The Association has always played a key role in highlighting the issues which affect its members in their day-to-day lives and their capacity to participate fully and equally in society.

IWA calls on the government's impending budget to reflect the needs and hopes of all citizens including people with disabilities.

The proposed new budget must aim to: -

- **Invest in the social inclusion of people with disabilities.**
- **Invest in measures that create improved equality and opportunities for people with disabilities.**
- **Direct funding to where it will have the greater impact and the most beneficial outcomes for people with disabilities.**

In order to progress the social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities the IWA has prioritized five key disability issues that require investment to advance the above aims.

1. **A. Core funding of all current health services being provided by Community Employment schemes.**
B. Core funding of staff for Resource & Outreach Centres for people with physical and sensory disabilities.
2. **Address the waiting list for Personal Assistance Services**
3. **Housing Adaptation Grant for people with a disability.**
4. **Introduction of a Cost of Disability payment.**
5. **Equal Access to Employment for all.**

Research has shown that people with disabilities experience high levels of social exclusion, unemployment, discrimination, poverty and are statistically educationally disadvantaged. These facts have been acknowledged and change has been legislated for under Disability Act 2005, Equal Status Act 2000, Employment Equality Act 1998, etc. However, the magnitude of change needed will not happen by chance, planning and investment is needed at this crucial stage to enact on legislation. Pre planning for the budget is an opportune time to fulfil Government promises and the people's mandate for progress.

The principle of this need for investment is simple but powerful; the social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities. It is hard to credit in this modern and prosperous society that human rights, dignity and equality are issues which continue to dominate the disability agenda. Careful fiscal management in the budget is the key to securing enhanced quality of life for people with disabilities. Investment in the five key areas, which will now be outlined in detail, will secure and develop equality and opportunity for people with disabilities into the future.

Real Outcomes achieved through the provision of essential health and personal social services for people with disabilities.

IWA calls for the Core Funding of all current health services being provided by Community Employment schemes.

The Disability Act 2005 announced the government's commitment to protect and develop services for people with disabilities. It is therefore unthinkable that the most vital and basic services are being delivered by Community Employment (CE) participants. The Irish Wheelchair Association relies on Community Employment Schemes to provide care and driving staff for core and essential services in IWA's Resource and Outreach Centres (ROC's) in 68 locations nationally, serving 3,000 people weekly.

IWA acknowledges that many excellent and dedicated Community Employment participants have played a major role in the development and provision of services for the disability sector. However, disability services are at a critical stage where the quality and numbers of participants available is threatening IWA's ability to continue to deliver services. More and more the IWA are finding that applicants for Community Employment schemes are totally unsuitable to work in the healthcare sector. Additionally, while the IWA supports the new CE training programme the changes will have considerable impact on the availability of CE participants to provide daily services.

This position can not be overstated, nor the vital immediacy of addressing this issue in the impending budget.

IWA's position is supported by "Towards 2016" which states:

"In its consideration of the core funding requirements of agencies providing services for people with disabilities, the Health Service Executive will be asked to take into account the appropriateness of core funding essential health and personal social services".

It must be re-emphasised that these core essential services are for many people their only support service, forming a lifeline for both people with disabilities and their families. The services provided by Community Employment have now become the mainstay of service provision to people with disabilities. All stakeholders, service users, voluntary organisations and the health services have become dependent on their remaining in place.

If the core funding of services provided by Community Employment fails to be addressed in this budget IWA will be in an untenable position where, due to the quality and lack of availability of Community Employment participants, services may be reduced and new initiatives postponed. Revenue investment needs to be directed to core funding of all current health services being provided by Community Employment schemes.

Real Outcomes achieved through the provision of quality essential health and personal social services for people with disabilities.

IWA calls for the Core Funding of staff for Resource & Outreach Centres for people with physical and sensory disabilities.

IWA's Resource & Outreach Centres (ROC's) provide services for people with physical and sensory disabilities in the heart of the local community. The ROC's are hubs for centre services that provide a variety of group programmes and individual supports in all aspects of daily life.

In a number of locations ROC centres provide mainstream 'bridging programmes' that are designed and implemented to support people in their chosen path. These may include; personal development, Rehabilitative Training, educational courses, computer skills, FETAC certificate courses and skills development. Additionally, each ROC is an access point for valuable resources, services & supports which includes: Assisted Living Service, Advocacy, Motoring Advice Assessment and Tuition, Information, Sport, Respite Holidays, Peer Counselling, Youth Services and Volunteerism. Staff in the ROC's have a strong focus on creating links and partnerships with all other disability and community services to support people.

To continue to deliver this vital service in the community requires the provision of core staff. It is a basic requirement that has failed to receive dedicated funding in consecutive budgets over the past number of years.

The government's commitment to provide quality services for people with disabilities is clearly stated in the Disability Bill 2005. In order to continue to provide these essential core services to 3000 people weekly, the IWA calls for investment in the provision of core staff.

Real Outcomes achieved through people with disabilities having the opportunity to exercise control and choice over their lives.

IWA calls for the funding to address the waiting list for Personal Assistance Services.

Analysis of the need for Personal Assistance Services carried out by the IWA indicates there are in excess of 1000 people currently on waiting lists for the service.

Personal Assistance Services provide people with the opportunity to exercise control and choice in their lives. In so doing it enables people to be active participants within their families, communities and society. The National Disability Authority review document "Towards Best Practice in the Provision of Health Service for People with Disabilities" 2004, recognised this when it stated that the provision of Personal Assistance is a minimal requirement for people with disabilities.

"Towards an Independent Future" the report of The Review Group on Health and Personal Social Services for People with Disabilities, 1996, identified an average need for 10 hours of service per person per week. The report stated that this level of service could respond to the essential personal care needs only, quality of life requirements were not accounted for in this estimate.

IWA estimates a current unmet need of over 520,000 hours per annum for Personal Assistant Services for people with physical and sensory disabilities alone.

IWA calls on the Minister for Finance at a minimum to meet its commitment as stated in his budget speech 2004 to provide 1.2 million extra Personal Assistant hours before 2009.

Real outcomes achieved through people with disabilities having the opportunity and support to continue to live independently in their own local community.

IWA calls for Investment to be directed into the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme for People with a Disability.

IWA continues to place high on its pre budget proposal the need to significantly increase funding in the area of home adaptation as people with disabilities are living in homes that are totally inaccessible. Local Authorities waiting lists for the scheme continue to rapidly grow as homes remain un-adapted.

Housing grants were established with the set objective of supporting and enabling disabled people to continue to live independently in their own local community by carrying out approved modifications to their existing accommodation. However, inadequate funding continues to make the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability ineffective in achieving this objective.

People with disabilities often have to undertake considerable adaptation and extension to their homes at critical life stages. This also occurs at a time when personal income has been reduced dramatically and future income remains uncertain. Adaptations are not lifestyle choices but basic necessities. The decision to adapt a home is also taken against a background where a supply or availability of appropriate accessible housing remains inadequate.

The IWA welcomes that the new Housing Adaptation Grant for People with disability has become index-linked. However, the means test cut off sum of €30,000, in which to be eligible to possibly receive a full grant, leaves people with a considerable shortfall to meet. This can clearly be illustrated by the extensive costs of an adaptation undertaken by many wheelchair users; a bedroom/bathroom extension with some internal reorganisation would cost in the region of €60,000 to € 70,000. Finding additional funding to carry out essential home adaptation often becomes impossible or places considerable financial burden on individuals or families. As a result many people with disabilities continue to be trapped in unsuitable, inaccessible homes. Further reform is needed to the Housing Adaptation Grant criteria in order to secure the best possible short and long-term outcomes for people with disability.

The Budget needs to direct increased capital funding in order for Local Authorities to respond to the demand for the Housing Adaptation Grant. IWA and other disability organizations would welcome continued engagement with all stakeholders in order to ensure that the housing needs of people with disabilities are met.

Real outcomes that achieve enhanced quality of life for people with disabilities.

IWA calls for the introduction of a Cost of Disability Payment.

The Cost of Disability can be defined as the amount it costs a disabled person to achieve the same standard of living as a non-disabled person. It is recognised nationally and internationally that people with disabilities incur many extra living costs as a result of their disability such as; heating, disability aids & equipment, above average medical and drug costs, care costs and above average transport costs. The Cost of Disability payment would offset these extra costs and go some way to alleviate the poverty experienced by many people with disabilities.

A Cost of Disability Payment needs to meet these extra costs separately rather than through higher basic income maintenance, so that all people with disabilities will benefit equally. In the present system additional social welfare payments and benefits are not comprehensive and in many cases are paid on a discretionary basis. For example, a person with a disability may qualify for free travel but will not be able to use it due to the unavailability of accessible transport or supports in their community.

The immediate introduction of a Cost of Disability payment for people with disabilities in receipt of social welfare payments will be a first step in supporting people in meeting the extra costs incurred.

The Cost of Disability Payment is recommended by a number of reports and studies including the National Disability Authority's 2004 report "Disability and the Cost of Living", the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities and the National Economic and Social Forum.

Real outcomes that achieve enhanced quality of life for people with disabilities.

IWA calls for investment to be directed into measures that ensure equal access to employment for all.

People with disabilities want to contribute to the economic growth and development of the country. Yet despite sustained economic and jobs growth over the last decade in Ireland, in 2006 fewer people with disabilities were employed than in previous years. While there was an overall growth in employment in 2006 of 4.2%, an estimated 70% of people with disabilities are unemployed in Ireland today. People with disabilities are clearly not benefiting from the extraordinary reduction in unemployment; they remain excluded from the labour market. National Disability Authority research shows that in the European context people with disabilities in Ireland are less likely to be in work, education and training when compared to their European peer group. These statistics are in direct conflict with the social vision of Ireland being an equal and inclusive society.

In light of these facts IWA calls for an immediate comprehensive review of employment services for people with disabilities. An essential part of the review should examine the effectiveness of Supported Employment Programme and address the lack of uptake of employment supports. This detailed review must also examine the training and supports currently being provided to people with disabilities seeking employment.

Additionally, IWA calls for the implementation of measures that promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities to enter the open labour market and that also remove barriers. Significant barriers exist in the current system which traps people with disabilities into remaining out of work particularly because of the possible loss of medical cards and other secondary benefits, including the loss of free travel. People with disabilities fear of losing their medical card is the most common reason given for not applying for job or for not moving from part time employment to fulltime. People may be worse off or insufficiently better off if they take up employment.

IWA urges the Government to fulfil point 6 of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment Sectoral Plan under the Disability act as stated; *'collaborating with other key Government Departments and agencies to promote the removal of the disincentives and benefits traps that may create barriers to employment'*.

IWA continues to lobby for the implementation of the recent enactment of the public sector 3% employment quota for people with disabilities which could create up to 7,500 jobs.

To address the issue of equal access to employment, IWA calls on the government to implement a national awareness campaign amongst employers. IWA views this as a priority in order to raise the profile and create a better understanding of the important contribution people with disabilities can make. A positive image campaign would embrace diversity in the workplace and promote a more equal society.

CONCLUSION

The Government has declared their commitment to the creation of a modern society that benefits all citizens equally. Ireland is clearly in the midst of the longest and strongest era of sustained prosperity. It is therefore an opportune time for the government to look after the more vulnerable groups in our society. IWA calls on the Government's proposed budget to invest in real outcomes that will secure the social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities. The government's progressive investment in the: -

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2. Address the waiting list for Personal Assistance Services
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By addressing these issues it will directly enhance the quality of life of people with disabilities and move us closer to a shared vision of equality for all citizens.